

# Building child safe organisations



**BERNADETTE McMENAMIN discusses an information and training program developed by ECPAT Australia to assist children's organisations to achieve best practice in child abuse prevention**

*Choose With Care* is a practical guide to preventing the infiltration of sex offenders into children's programs, and minimising opportunities for abuse to occur. The program was conceived in 1992 from a personal realisation of the apparent ease in which sex offenders target and infiltrate children's organisations. Over a 20-year career as a social worker and children's rights campaigner, I have worked alongside or befriended at least two child sex offenders. The first was eventually convicted for the offences, and the second, a known offender who kept one step

ahead of the police, took his life when the police traced his location for the last time.



What was striking to me personally was that these individuals gave no clear indication of their behaviour – but were there signs? Were there indicators in their words, actions, behaviours that triggered some questions that I dismissed or ignored? If they were repeat and known offenders, how could they enter one children's organisation after another without being noticed?

## ORDER FORM



### *Choose with care* Building Child Safe Organisations

**Choose With Care** is an information and training program designed to assist organisations establish a safe environment for the children and young people in their care.

The **Choose With Care** kit is a user friendly handbook and video package that provides a wide range of child protection strategies. It is a 12-step program that provides practical child protection strategies including managing risk, improving recruitment and selection, appropriate reporting procedures, and legal responsibilities.

**This edition of Choose With Care is a Victorian pilot project and copies are limited. Secure your copy now to avoid disappointment.**

**Pricing:** \$55.00 (ECPAT members and unfunded organisations) including GST \$66.00 (funded organisations) including GST

*Please complete details overleaf* ➤

These are the sorts of questions I have heard repeated countless times in the years that I have been researching and inquiring into institutional child sexual abuse. In nearly every case I have read or discussed with colleagues there was someone in the organisation who felt concern about their colleague's behaviour but felt unable or unwilling to raise these questions with management and/or authorities.

From the grim starting point of experience I began the inquiry into identifying the dynamics of sexual abuse in children's organisations, and strategies for its prevention.

International research and local press coverage indicates that sexual abuse of children does indeed occur in children's organisations, programs and activities, in significant numbers, although not nearly to the extent of child sexual abuse in the home and extended family. It is apparent that sex offenders will target these programs and organisations to gain access and build relationships with children and young people. Their motive is the eventual abuse of one or more of the children they meet in the facility, either on the premises or through building a relationship with the child and/or their family outside of program hours.

The issue has been addressed in various ways by professionals in the field, with perhaps the most well know being Ray Wyre's (1996) concept of the "aware culture". The aware culture involves linking all aspects of the environment to ensure the program is protective, enriches the lives of its children and families, and is clear about the boundaries between the personal and professional lives of staff (Kiralay 1998).

There has also been research and analysis of recruitment and selection practices in children's organisations, and this was the focus of the first *Choose with Care* publication (Kiralay 1998), produced by ECPAT (End Child Prostitution and Trafficking) Australia. Sex offenders are attracted to organisations that provide easy access to children. Organisations that are particularly vulnerable are those that are unaware of the risks of child abuse and have inadequate recruitment, screening, communication and supervision procedures.

*Choose With Care* is a proactive, preventative and participatory approach to building and maintaining child safe organisations. It aims to inspire child focused organisations, large and small, to become informed about the nature of child abuse, to recognise how it can and does exist in these organisations, and to assist them to take decisive, informed and manageable steps towards establishing and maintaining child safe environments.

## ABOUT ECPAT



E C P A T

ECPAT stands for Ending Child Prostitution Pornography and Trafficking. It is a global network of organisations and individuals working together for the elimination of child prostitution, child pornography and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes. It seeks to encourage the world community to ensure that children everywhere enjoy their fundamental rights, free and secure from all forms of commercial sexual exploitation.

ECPAT Australia has been at the forefront of program innovation in preventing the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people in Australia and overseas. In acknowledgement of these achievements, ECPAT Australia has received many major awards, including the 1996 Australian Human Rights Award, and the 1999 ACFOA Human Rights Award.

The new handbook edition of *Choose With Care: Building Child Safe Organisations* (2001) provides a holistic model of child abuse prevention that can be applied by the smallest sports group or the largest welfare institution. It focuses on the prevention of child sexual abuse, but many of the strategies provided are generic and will assist in preventing all forms of child abuse. *Choose With Care* provides a 12-step practical guide to preventing the infiltration of sex offenders into children's programs, and minimising opportunities for abuse to occur. It can be used as guide for those groups and programs venturing into establishing child protection strategies for the first time. It should also be used as a tool for assisting the review of current practices, and a guide for addressing gaps or weaknesses in practices – that is, reporting complaints, or identifying and managing risks.

This edition of *Choose With Care* is a world first in that it provides a cyclic approach to building child safe organisations by addressing planning, implementation and review, returning to planning and so on. It brings together international best practice in child abuse prevention and human services management. The first section, "Towards a child safe organisation", is planning oriented and presents the context of the *Choose With Care* program. It provides an overview of what is meant by a

◀ See overleaf

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<input type="checkbox"/> copy/copies of <i>Choose With Care</i> @ \$.....		each \$ _____	
Postage and handling @ \$5.50 (Victoria)		\$ _____	
or \$8.70 (all other Australian destinations)		<b>Total \$</b> _____	
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“child safe organisation”. The second section, “Developing child safe policies and procedures”, is action oriented and outlines the specific steps required in establishing child safety in organisations. These steps include child protection policy development, recruitment, selection and screening of staff and volunteers, and management and supervision. The third section, “Maintaining a child safe organisation” is reflection oriented and recognises that organisations are inherently organic and must remain responsive to change in order to maintain best practice.

The strategies, models and checklists offered in *Choose With Care* are intended to assist organisations to start immediately to examine and review their practices and environments with a child safety perspective. We have demystified and simplified the processes of policy development and recruitment, screening and selection so that it is accessible to as many groups and organisations as possible. The argument for this style is that the more approachable and user-friendly the model, the more likely it is to be sustained and used within organisations in the long term.

**O**ur extensive consultation with groups and programs has revealed that all too frequently these groups feel ill-equipped and under-resourced to address child protection and operate on the hope that child abuse is not occurring and will not occur in their group. *Choose With Care* is intended to reach these groups and provide a resource for the process. Their contribution is of time, energy, participation and a firm commitment to providing the safest environment possible to the children and young people in their care. Indeed, as time moves along, providing the safest environment possible is becoming a legal as much as a moral imperative. The overall aim of *Choose With Care* is to provide a systematic and user friendly child abuse prevention guide.

In concluding, I would like to acknowledge the outstanding work of the vast majority of carers and volunteers working safely with children. The contribution these men and women make in the lives of so many children and young people in the community is recognised, affirmed, and valued. *Choose With Care* aims to support these workers by promoting strategies, models and skills that will assist in making child and youth organisations a safer environment for everyone.

Finally, *Choose With Care* remains a work in progress. As long as children and young people continue to be abused and exploited in groups and programs in which they have every right to feel safe and secure, the work of identifying new and more effective strategies for rethinking and adapting high risk environments and practices will continue. To this end the feedback and comments from organisations and individuals accessing and applying the *Choose With Care* package is encouraged.

### References

Kiraly, M. (1998), “Residential Child Care Staff Selection”, School of Public Health, Latrobe University, Melbourne, Australia.

Wyre, R. (1996), “Preventing sexual abuse through organisational strategies”, in *Facing the Issues Together: A Response to Sexual Abuse Within the Church*, Melbourne, Australia.

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Inquiries and orders can be directed to ECPAT Australia. Telephone: (03) 9645 8911. Email: [ecpat@ecpat.org](mailto:ecpat@ecpat.org)

## Join the discussion

# childprotect

**Interested in discussing child abuse prevention issues on-line? Want to make contacts with interstate and international colleagues? Join childprotect now!**

*childprotect* is a moderated email discussion list developed by the National Child Protection Clearinghouse to provide a venue for professionals to discuss child abuse prevention and child protection research, policy and practice issues.

With a small but expanding membership, *childprotect* has been designed with the specific aim of promoting the exchange of information and ideas between Australasian and other professionals working in the field of child abuse prevention and child protection.

The current membership includes child protection workers; other health and welfare service providers; people working in the criminal justice system, education and training, and policy and service planning; and researchers and information providers.

*childprotect's* topics for discussion include:

- requests for research, policy or practice information;
- developments and changes to child protection and child abuse prevention;
- best practice in child abuse prevention and child protection;
- the discussion of broader family violence issues;
- education and training issues;
- notices about upcoming conferences, workshops, events; and
- pointers to new publications, on-line papers, resources/links, and web sites.

To join *childprotect* send the following email:

To: [majordomo@aifs.org.au](mailto:majordomo@aifs.org.au)  
Subject: (leave blank)  
Message: subscribe childprotect

To send a message to all members of *childprotect*, address your email to: [childprotect@aifs.org.au](mailto:childprotect@aifs.org.au)

Dr Adam Tomison, Research Advisor for the National Child Protection Clearinghouse, at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, is the *childprotect* list owner. For further information contact Adam at: [owner-childprotect@aifs.org.au](mailto:owner-childprotect@aifs.org.au)